



NEW LONDON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

TO: Members of the Education Committee

FROM: Dr. Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent of New London Public Schools

DATE: March 15, 2023

RE: EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING ON H.B. 6879, AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Dear Chairs McCrory and Currey, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, Vice Chairs Leeper and Winfield, and distinguished members of the Education Committee,

Today I speak to you to share my support of H.B. 6879, AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION. As a superintendent of New London Public Schools, one of CT's Alliance Districts, I strongly encourage the committee to make this legislation a priority for the 2023 legislative session. It has been over two decades since Connecticut's educator certification and preparation requirements have been comprehensively reworked. This means that candidates who want to become part of the educator workforce in Connecticut – a dire need for the state given current educator shortages – are operating under rules and regulations that have not been updated since before many were born (1998). Piecemeal changes have only further entangled rules and processes. The result is a complex, daunting, and expensive web of educator certification requirements. These requirements have not kept up with what we know today is needed to be a professional educator, who can effectively prepare students for the world that awaits them upon graduation. We, like many other CT school districts, continue to struggle with the filling of critical teaching positions and this is not ok for our students.

Now is the time to solve these problems in ways that will build a robust, diverse, and high-quality educator workforce, with the aim to support our school systems efficiently as we welcome and onboard candidates just starting their careers, those looking to make a career change, and/or who are relocating to Connecticut. As outlined in this bill, establishing a **Commission to Modernize the Educator Workforce** is a strong next step to address the issue, and as written, the bill includes representation from key stakeholders. Additionally, the guiding principles set forth in Sec. 2(f) of the bill serve as strong orientation. In addition, I share the following additional considerations:

1. Update and Re-Align Teacher Certification Regulations: The Commission should proceed with an understanding that the goal is to fully review all existing teacher certification regulations, then repeal and replace them with a set of user-friendly, plain language, easy-to-apply for regulations so that hiring criteria can be easily sourced and district-level hiring personnel are empowered to make informed staffing decisions that best serve districts, schools, and students. One such example of this is the request to put back Kindergarten certification into the current grades 1-6 endorsement. Attention also needs to be given to the requirements and costs of associated exams and application fees for certification. The need for changes in these regulations is critical. I remain incredibly concerned about the current certified teacher shortages we have (with an average of 33 unfilled vacancies the past three years) and the statistics we already know about these shortages exacerbating. Student and fellow educators are in dire need of high-quality educators to be in classrooms and there is a state of emergency in this area.
2. Update and Re-Align College Preparation Programs for Education: The Commission should recognize that the collegiate pipeline to certification must also simultaneously be updated to better align to current trends in other majors. As a parent of four young adult children, who are all currently in different college preparation programs, I see vast differences in expectations and financial requirements depending on which degree is being pursued. I have personally witnessed life-shaking



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stressors of students in education preparation programs who are at breaking points attempting to balance paying for their education, while serving in unpaid internships in CT's schools. This becomes an extreme hardship (and deterrent) for many college students who need to figure out how to pay for off campus housing, transportation, balance coursework (even when they are not on campus) and then work in internships servicing students for free. This is a set up for failure not only for young adults, but also for those looking for a career change. Details like these are huge deterrents to those who may consider joining this incredible profession. On the flip side, my son who is pursuing a Computer Science degree, experienced being well-paid for an internship and not having to pay tuition to the college at that time. These inequitable college experiences need to be remedied. Additionally, salaries for the education profession need to rise. Educators are life changers who work extremely hard to support our state's youth. Through the Commission's work, solutions can be found to modernize the collegiate pathway to certification, while simultaneously updating the state's certification endorsement framework and considering how to align educator pay scales to other professions.

3. Continue Engagement of CPRL in Partnership: The Commission should continue to recognize the importance of naming the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL), at Columbia University, as a member of the Commission. CPRL has experience in bringing about systems-level change in ways that transform school systems, so that they can provide all students with exceptional learning experiences. As that relates to Connecticut, CPRL has been a lead convener of the Connecticut Innovation Cohort, a group of key education, policy, nonprofit, and workforce leaders working in tandem with school system leaders/practitioners to improve Connecticut's public school system over the last two years. It has been an honor and pleasure to be a part of this team, focused on transformative work. We continue to meet regularly, both in person and virtually, to review data and research and to brainstorm solutions for a future that presents smoother and more supportive pathways to certification. CPRL continues to be very familiar with the challenges facing the Connecticut educational landscape, as well as strategies to address them. With CPRL's participation, the Commission will have the benefit of a neutral but well-informed party together with legal, policy, educational, and change management expertise, which are all key elements to the success of this much-needed effort. CPRL recently published a document entitled, CONNECTICUT EDUCATOR INSIGHTS ON BUILDING A MORE EFFECTIVE, DIVERSE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE; written by CPRL, MARCH 2023. This document further highlights the concerns of the current, outdated pathways to certification and the incredible and immediate need CT schools have for solutions to realign these processes and pathways in partnership with various stakeholders, to include college preparation programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. A thorough review of teacher certification regulations and educator preparation programming can result in creating flexible onramps into the profession, without compromising quality and standards. The over-arching aim continues to be to increase CT's highly qualified and diverse educator workforce, to serve our amazing students. This is what educators need, and this is what every Connecticut student deserves. CT has no time to waste. This extremely important reform work must continue. Thank you, again, for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Cynthia Ritchie
Superintendent of Schools
New London Public Schools